

ORIENTATION COMMENTARY FOR
JANE AUSTEN'S
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

(1995 BBC VERSION: COLIN FIRTH AND JENNIFER EHLE)

By Fr. Andrew Umberg

This series is a magnificent adaptation of this most famous Jane Austen novel from the Nineteenth Century. It takes place in the early 1800's (1820's?) in England. The entire series runs about five hours and is very well done in a variety of ways (screenplay, dialogue, acting, costumes and "on location" sets). For many, it is entertaining to the point of addiction, but it is a little bit confusing at first. This "orientation commentary" is my attempt to do what someone did for me when I watched it for the first time, to define some terms and clarify a few issues for the first-time viewer (maybe the second and third-time viewer as well!).

Some Key Terms and Concepts (my own attempts at useful definitions):

Nobility-(the word "noble" means being able to stand on one's own—independent) the people who own their own land. Most of the farmland and forests in England were owned by people whose (male) ancestors had fought for the land or had been granted the land by the king as a reward and guarantee of loyal military service. Those who farmed the land could be their employees or tenants who rented the land. This guaranteed that they could be rich and building large, beautiful houses on their estates and hire servants to keep them up, to cook, clean, etc. Some could also afford to rent or own a lavish place in London. They looked down on anyone who actually had to work for a living, as a servant, as a tenant farmer or as an entrepreneur "in trade". These people were always dependent on the nobles, at least indirectly; it was a very bad idea to do something to get a noble mad at you.

Commoner-someone who is not of a noble family. While it is possible to marry into a noble family, it was frowned upon by the nobility, both for the noble who is marrying down and the upstart commoner who would try to attract a noble advantageously in a romantic way.

Servant-those who worked directly for the nobles, often in the house and around the estate. They were **addressed by their last names**, to keep a professional distance and distinction from the family with whom they lived. (e.g., Mrs. Bennet's main house servant is "Hill".)

Income-of course it means the money a person gets each year. However, the nobles did not really work for it. It would be determined, apparently by one's parents, in consultation with lawyers and accountants, based on the revenues from their holdings. Apparently, most of the nobles knew, or could easily find out, how much a young man's or woman's annual income was. It was obviously an important consideration in deciding whom one should marry, for both young gentlemen and women.

Gentleman-a man born into a noble family, whether he would inherit the land or not. He would still have a certain fixed income from the family estate.

Lady- a woman born into a noble family, although I think she has to be married to a gentleman to be addressed with the title "Lady". To be referred to by that title (instead of Mrs.), she may have to be the wife or widow of a Knight. (I'm not sure.)

Sir—An honorary title of Knighthood given (by the King?) to certain persons of the nobility (I believe it can be inherited), in recognition of some special service to the king. (There is a kind but bumbling character by the name of Sir William Lucas, whose family plays an important role in the story.)

Entailment- a legal stipulation that a property must be handed down to a male heir who is a direct descendant of the nobleman who owns the property. If the property is entailed, and there are no male children, the estate is inherited, like a royal crown, by the closest male relative, who can evict the widow and other family members at will. (The Bennet family (whose members are key protagonists) lives in a mansion on an entailed estate. They have five grown daughters and no sons...uh-oh!)

Introduction- While we all know what it means to introduce people, it is easy to forget how important this was in a society like Nineteenth Century England. If you have not been introduced, it is rude to address someone directly, especially with any presumed familiarity, especially if they outrank you. (There are a few incidents in the movie when this custom is violated, and the noble person involved feels violated!)

Clergyman—In this story, this term refers to a minister of the Church of England, which was headed by the King of England since the time of King Henry VIII. It was often the case that a church was built by a nobleman, for the use of his family and for the tenants, servants and townsmen. **The clergyman was allowed to marry**, and often had a fixed income, granted them by the nobleman who owned the church. He (or she) was the clergyman's patron. Becoming a clergyman was a good way for a poor boy to receive an education and a stable career and income. Nobles also could receive a calling to be clergymen.

Key Characters, Families, and Place Names: (You don't have to memorize them to enjoy the show, but it will be useful to refer to this guide! Spellings may be wrong...)

CHARACTERS AND FAMILIES:

Bennet Family—The central family of the story. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet live with their five daughters in a house called **Longbourn**, in a part of the English countryside known as Hertfordshire (pronounced HARTferdsher). Mr. Bennet is a nobleman (a gentleman), but they have limited money and no impressive family connections. Their estate is entailed, that is, it will not belong to the family after Mr. Bennet dies, because he has no male heir; instead, it will go to Mr. Collins, a cousin whom he has never met.

Elizabeth Bennet--- also known as “Lizzy” and “Eliza”, the heroine of the story; the Bennet’s second oldest daughter, a beautiful brunette who is wise, prudent, intelligent and sensible, although a little bit outspoken. Twenty years old.

Jane Bennet---the eldest daughter of the Bennet family a very beautiful blonde (maybe not the best casting here...); a sweet, kind, soft-spoken girl, on whom the family places hope that she will marry well and give Mrs. Bennet and the other girls a place to live.

Mary Bennet---the unattractive, annoyingly pious middle daughter, who is rather accomplished at playing the piano.

Kitty Bennet—the cute, whining, second youngest daughter; she engages in mischief and constant bickering with her younger sister, Lydia.

Lydia Bennet---the youngest daughter. She is fifteen years old, physically mature, but psychologically immature. She is also vain, flirtatious, inconsiderate and far from mild-mannered at social gatherings.

Mr. Gardiner—an attorney, Mrs. Bennet’s brother, and uncle to the Bennet girls. His wife and children visit the Bennets’ with their young children. They take Elizabeth on vacation up north to the hill country.

Mr. Bingley—a charming, kind, humble young nobleman who, at the first scene of the movie, decides to buy **Netherfield** a country estate in Hertfordshire, neighboring the Bennet’s estate.

Caroline Bingley—the tall, thin brunette sister of Mr. Bingley. She is a kind, intelligent and moral person, refined, but also quite snooty. She wants to look out for her brother (and her brother’s money). She also seems very fond of Mr. Darcy.

Mrs. Hurst—The petite redheaded sister of Mr. Bingley.

Mr. Hurst---Mr. Bingley’s brother-in-law, not too bright, usually drunk or hung-over

Mr. Darcy---The tall, handsome, dashing, intelligent, proud and rich nobleman who was apparently a school chum of Mr. Bingley. He is admired and respected by Mr. Bingley. They wear hats that look like they are officers in the navy (like Captain Crunch!) but this is just the fashion at the time. Although he has his own estate named **Pemberly** in a region of England known as **Derbyshire**, some fifty miles away, he apparently enjoys the company of his friend Mr. Bingley and his two sisters. He has come down to Hertfordshire (which he considers the land of country bumpkins) to be with his friend in this adventure a buying an estate in which to “settle”. Mr. Darcy has a younger sister, **Georgiana**, who is about 16 years old. There may be some hopes that someday Mr. Bingley will marry her.

Sir William Lucas—the ranking citizen of Hertfordshire, lives with his wife and daughters in **Lucas Lodge**. Not too intelligent, but very upbeat and happy; fond of saying “Very good” and “Capital!”

Miss Charlotte Lucas---the rather plain, but intelligent and sensible (even cynical?) daughter of Sir William Lucas; she is Elizabeth Bennet’s best friend outside of family.

Mr. Collins---the silly, (creepy?), bumbling clergyman, who is a cousin and the closest male relative of Mr. Bennet—therefore the one to inherit **Longbourn**, the Bennet’s estate. He has just been ordained. He has a post at the church patronized by Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This church is at least several hours away from where the Bennett family lives.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh—a rich, imperious, snooty noblewoman. She is a widow with one grown daughter, who is not in great health; owns a large estate named Rosings Park. She also happens to be the aunt of the wealthy young Mr. Darcy, who is the son of her deceased sister.

Colonel Fitzwilliam—Mr. Darcy’s charming first cousin who visits their aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh at the same time Mr. Darcy does, perhaps so that they can have someone to spend time with there, other than Lady Catherine. He is probably a military officer because he is not loaded like his cousin and his aunt.

Mr. Wickham—the tall, handsome, mild-mannered, humble and charming new military officer, who has joined the troops stationed in Hertfordshire. *Coincidentally*, he grew up at Mr. Darcy’s Pemberly Estate, where Wickham’s father was steward for Mr. Darcy’s father. There was a falling out at some point...

Colonel Forster—the commanding officer of the troops stationed at Merytim, a small town in Hertfordshire. He looks over fifty years old, but he has a wife who is a teenager, no doubt a financially advantageous marriage for her. She finds young Lydia Bennet to be a fun friend.

PLACE NAMES (some are real; some fictional):

Hertfordshire (pronounced *HARTferdsher*)—the part of the English countryside where the Bennets live.

Merytim---the small town in Hertfordshire.

Red Lion--- a tavern?/ assembly hall in Merytim (A dance is held there in the first episode)

Brighton---a resort city in England on its southern coast

Longbourn—the Bennet family estate.

Netherfield—the estate just purchased (leased?) by Mr. Bingley

Lucas Lodge—the estate of Sir William Lucas and family

Kent—the county where Mr. Collins' church is and his patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Rosings Park—the pompous estate of Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Pemberly—Mr. Darcy's estate. (a huge and beautiful mansion surrounded by so much forest that someone touring his property in a coach asks "Will we get to the house before nightfall?")

Derbyshire (pronounced *DARBisher*)—the region of England where Mr. Darcy's estate is. Elizabeth Bennet goes on vacation to Derbyshire with her uncle, Mr. Gardiner, and his wife (Elizabeth's aunt by marriage), who is from Derbyshire.

Lambton—a little town in Derbyshire, where Elizabeth Bennet's aunt is from; they stay at an inn in that town during their vacation up north.